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Influenza Activity on the Rise:

CDC Urges Mainers to Take Precautions

AUGUSTA - The Department of Health and Human Services' Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention wants Mainers to take important steps to stop the spread of influenza, which has increased over the last two weeks throughout the state.

"We can all take steps to help stop the spread of influenza," said Dr. Dora Mills, Director of the Maine CDC. "With the increase in influenza activity, it is especially important to pay close attention to respiratory hygiene by covering our coughs and sneezes, washing our hands frequently and staying home if we're sick."

After first being detected in Maine sometime in late November, influenza activity was reported to be sporadic or localized through the end of January. In the last two weeks, however, reports of influenza from outpatient physician offices and hospitals have risen. In addition, more than a dozen outbreaks have been reported in nursing homes.

"If you haven't had a shot and if there is still flu vaccine in your community, it would be a good idea to get vaccinated," Dr. Mills said. "Some physician offices, hospitals and home health care agencies still have vaccine."

Although there is a decrease in the relative effectiveness of this year's vaccine against two of the three circulating strains, influenza vaccination still provides some protection and is strongly encouraged for those persons at risk of more severe disease.

The Maine CDC offers the following recommendations:

- **Influenza vaccination is still encouraged** for persons who wish to reduce their risk of becoming ill with or transmitting influenza and especially for all children 6 months – 4 years, adults over age 50, women who will be pregnant during the influenza season, persons with health conditions which place them at risk of influenza complications, residents of long term care facilities, health care workers and people who have close contact with persons at risk of complications. Call your physician, local hospital, or home health care agency to see if there is any vaccine available in your community.

- **Closely adhere to respiratory hygiene:**

- Stay home if you are ill and call your doctor if you are in a high-risk group.
- Cover your cough and sneezes;
- Wash your hands frequently;
- Be especially careful in visiting high-risk people, such as seniors.

For more information: www.mainepublichealth.gov